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Patrick P. McCurdy, Editor

July 21, 1970

Dr. Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics  
Stanford University Medical Center  
University School of Medicine  
Stanford, Calif. 94305

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

I wonder if you could do us a favor?

We recently carried a news story on the work of Dr. Khorana and his synthesis of a gene. I'm attaching a copy of that story. Not long thereafter, I received a letter from Dr. Robert W. Chambers of the New York University School of Medicine. I am enclosing a copy of Dr. Chambers' letter. As you can see, he takes serious exception to our story. I wonder if you, in confidence, would do me the favor of commenting on Dr. Chambers' views as well as on the C&EN story. Needless to say, your own comments will be kept in confidence and will not be used publicly in any way. I merely want to get to the fact of the matter. And if C&EN has indeed treated Dr. Khorana unfairly, then I would like to set the record straight.

Thank you for your time.

Best regards,

Patrick P. McCurdy  
Editor

When I read this story last month, I felt your reporter had probably lifted some of Dr. Spiegelman's "criticisms" out of context and inflated them beyond his own intentions; and if anyone is injured it would be Dr. Spiegelman. Chambers' appreciation of the quality of Khorana's work is unarguable, and the "critical" remarks are rather like quibbles, though not totally unjustified -- Khorana does of course use a combination of enzymatic and organic-synthetic methods but So What? The trouble is trying to label a "breakthrough" with a headline -- Kornberg ran into the same trouble with the journalistic treatments of "synthesizing a gene" too. C&EN might better have left it at a description of just what Khorana did do without unnecessary comment.

KHORANA

9-8.